

## **Good practice in academic publishing: Recommendations to the ECREA members**

Practices of Academic Publishing in Communication Task Force:

The Task Force aims:

The Special Panel on Practices of academic publishing in communication is a result of a joint effort of communication scholars involved in the eponymous ECREA Task Force. The original aim of the task force was, as explained by the former president of ECREA, to react to “a number of questionable publishing practices that display shortcomings in terms of academic rigour, peer review, and transparency” and to “monitor developments, engage in debate on publishing ethics and standards in the field, and develop clear recommendations for its members”. The above defined negative aspects of our publishing culture have been perceived by the task force team as inseparable from the neoliberal academia and its publish or perish culture and the gradual dominance of business approach to scientific publishing since the beginning.

During its existence, the task force identified three main areas that need to be addressed in detail if communication scholars want to promote and protect the highest standards in academic publishing. First, whereas predatory publishing has been reflected thoroughly and condemned by the scholarly community, it may still be difficult for many of us to identify similar strategies of the so-called grey zone publications and prevent publishing with them. Second, open access publishing principles seem to offer a solution to the problem of unequal access to information sources but, at the same time, represent an economic burden to the authors of scientific papers, mainly those from endangered economies. Third, co-authorship rules should be discussed in academia to prevent situations in which power relations influence the inclusion and position of co-authors, typically in papers co-authored by supervisors or high-profile scholars.

Recommendations:

1. Follow standards of academic rigour shared in your field and expect these standards from the journals you intend to publish with. If in doubt, consult with experienced authorities, such as senior colleagues sticking to ethical standards, your institutions’ ethical committees or professional organisations focusing on publication ethics (such as COPE – Committee on Publication Ethics – <https://publicationethics.org>).
2. With regard to quality journals publications, do not expect a very fast review process. In a standard review process, according to the experienced editors, it typically takes more than two months to provide the researchers with a first-round decision on their submissions (except for desk rejects, of course). If a journal promises a very fast review process (withing a few weeks), be cautious and check databases (Scientific Journal Ranking, Web of Science – Clarivate Analytics) for further details, such as the proportion of self-citations in the journal etc. (see below).
3. Be aware of the existence of the so-called predatory journals or predatory publishing practice. However, in addition to predators, there is a wide “grey zone” of journals which also employ several questionable publishing practices displaying shortcomings in terms of academic rigour, peer review, and transparency. Some of them may even be listed as

emerging sources in the Web of Science database or elsewhere. Pay attention not only to the speed of the review process (see above), but also to other aspects to avoid publishing in dubious platforms. The following practice may (but doesn't have to) be problematic:

- high numbers of articles the journal publishes annually (check the databases listed above to find out)
- high proportion of self-citations (check the databases listed above to find out)
- high publication fees
- excessive number of "special issues"

4. Do not accept it as unproblematic if a journal asks you to cite recent publications from the same journal. The ECREA TF evaluated this as an ethically problematic publishing practice.

5. Do not accept it as unproblematic if your supervisor (or any other person in a position of power) asks you to include them among the authors of your paper or book – to be listed as authors, researchers need to contribute substantially to the final publication outcome (meaning that they are expected to contribute to at least one of the following research phases: research design, sampling, data collection/analysis, data interpretation, literature review, writing of the outcome). Quality journals typically offer a list of conditions that need to be met to be considered authors.

6. If you wish to contribute to a de-Westernisation of the academia or its de-commercialisation, pay attention to your citation strategies. By citing previous work published in quality journals outside the rank of high-profile journals situated in the West, you may contribute to making these "underdog" journals more visible and successful in the academic world ruled by the scientometric logic. We understand that it may require you to put a lot of effort in checking the quality of such publication platforms, but we support and appreciate this strategy a lot.

7. Please share your experience regarding the above listed points with the scientific community and enter publishing ethics debates as often as possible to help cultivate the field.

8. We invite ECREA members to be aware of the publishing strategies of their universities and funding organisations if they are part of or have an affiliation with cOAlition S. The open access movement in scholarly publishing reached a new stage with the launch of cOAlition S in September 2018, which was originally set up as consortium of national research agencies and funders from twelve European countries. The Plan S initiative by cOAlition S requires "all scholarly publications on the results from research funded by public or private grants provided by national, regional and international research councils and funding bodies, must be published in Open Access Journals, on Open Access Platforms, or made immediately available through Open Access Repositories without embargo" with effect from 2021.

9. We believe that despite various opportunities and advantages of publishing our scholarly work open access, the caveats and possible negative repercussions of this move are still not properly debated in Social Science and Humanities (SSH), our research fields included. Despite the rapid growing Open Access market, we realised that it is not yet the dominant model. According to Delta Think, over 30% of all scholarly articles published as paid-for Open Access, accounts for just over 7% of the total journal publishing market value. We believe we need to understand better how trends in other disciplines will have an impact on our research.

10. We invite our members to continue debating possible implications of changes in our publishing practices, in particular the move from a traditional model to “Publish & Read”. There are three very important issues that require further attention of our members. Firstly, according to the the rights retention strategy endorsed by the Plan S, authors should retain copyright on their publications, which must be published under an open Creative Commons licence CC-BY. Secondly, currently not all journals and platforms are compliant with the criteria required by the CcOAlition (hybrid open-access journals are not compliant for instance). Finally, under Plan S, author publication fees should be covered by the funders or universities (not individual researchers), and there should be a standardized and capped fee scheme for publication. All these three commitments started to change our publishing practices drastically. We need to further debate and reflect on how these changes influence our scholarly communications and how our members coming from a less well-funded and under privileged research contexts will be able to operate within these changing circumstances.

11. According to the 2021 Association of Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishers (STM) Report, the global scholarly publishing market continues to grow (\$27 billion in 2018 to \$28 billion value in 2019, contracted to \$26.5 billion in the year of the pandemic, expected regain its pre-pandemic value of \$28 billion by 2023). Social Science and Humanities (SSH) journals and online content followed the same trend and reached an annual growth rates of 1.7% and 3.8% respectively between 2018 and 2020. Simba Information reported that the total market value of the SSH publishing market in 2020 was \$4.5billion. Simba Information also estimates that journals will overtake books as the largest SSH publishing activity by 2025. As ECREA, we need to follow these dynamic market figures from a close distance and reflect on how these changes are in fact received at the local and European levels in our collaborative scholarly communications.

12. There are important shifts in research output on the global scale. According to the Institute for Scientific Information, there is a significant progressive change in research conducted in Asia Pacific, Latin America and Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey (MENAT). The growth in number of papers produced by authors affiliated with institutions in China, India, Russian Federation, Italy, Spain, Australia, and Brazil validates this trend. United States, the EU, and Japan are more specialized in health sciences, whereas China and India are more specialized in engineering. We need to monitor and reflect on the changes in our fields as well.